

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY: FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY* AND *WINTER DREAMS* THROUGH MARXIST LITERARY CRITICISM

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### ABSTRACT

*This study discusses both Fitzgerald's works entitled The Great Gatsby as a novel (1926) and Winter Dreams (1922) as a short story. These works talk about a man who is originally from low social status but try to pursue his dream to be rich in purpose to get the women that he loves. The purposes of this study are to know the reason of why Gatsby and Dexter eager to be rich and being successful financially, and whether their reasons to be rich relate to economic power and class struggle in the context of Marxist criticism that had been proposed by Karl Marx or not. This also aims to know whether or not American society at that time gave contributions regarding Gatsby's and Dexter's action in pursuing their dreams for being rich as what had been depicted by Fitzgerald. This study is a descriptive qualitative study and uses library research and document study. In the end, this study found that both of The Great Gatsby and Winter Dreams that Fitzgerald wrote had the same theme regarding the social status and economic power. These two literary works had a difference where Gatsby believed that he would be able to get Daisy when he became rich while Dexter knew that he might not be able to be with Judy because of his low social status. Specifically, these works of Fitzgerald both carried a lot of social status and economic power issues which had been highly talked in 1920s.*

**Keywords:** The Great Gatsby, Winter Dream, Marxism, American Dream.

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas dua karya sastra karya Fitzgerald yang berjudul The Great Gatsby yang merupakan sebuah novel (1926) dan Winter Dreams (1922) yang merupakan cerita pendek. Kedua karya ini menceritakan tentang seorang pria yang sebelumnya berasal dari kalangan kelas ekonomi rendah tapi mencoba untuk menggapai mimpinya untuk menjadi kaya dengan tujuan untuk mendapatkan wanita yang dicintainya. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui alasan mengapa Gatsby dan Dexter ingin sekali untuk menjadi kaya dan mapan secara ekonomi, dan apakah alasan mereka untuk menjadi kaya berhubungan dengan kekuasaan ekonomi dan perjuangan kasta dalam konteks kritik Marxist dari Karl Marx atau tidak. Penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah masyarakat Amerika pada periode tersebut memberikan kontribusi terhadap perlakuan dari Gatsby dan Dexter dalam menggapai mimpi mereka untuk menjadi kaya seperti apa yang digambarkan oleh Fitzgerald. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dan menggunakan penelitian pustaka dan analisis dokumen. Akhirnya, penelitian ini mendapati bahwa The Great Gatsby dan Winter Dreams yang ditulis oleh Fitzgerald mempunyai tema yang sama terkait status sosial dan kuasa ekonomi. Dua karya ini punya sebuah perbedaan dimana Gatsby percaya bahwa dia akan mendapatkan Daisy jika dia menjadi kaya dan Dexter mengetahui bahwa dia tidak akan pernah mampu untuk bersama Judy dikarenakan status sosialnya. Secara spesifik, kedua karya dari Fitzgerald ini sama-sama membawa banyak permasalahan dan isu sosial terkait pengaruh kuasa ekonomi yang banyak diperbincangkan pada tahun 1920an.

**Kata Kunci:** The Great Gatsby, Winter Dream, Marxism, Impian masyarakat Amerika.  
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## INTRODUCTION

When Fitzgerald completed his short story entitled *Winter Dreams*, he claimed it as something which was indicated as a beginning of the creation of Gatsby's image. This information is derived from Fitzgerald's letter to Maxwell Perkins–Judy Jones (Theron, 2013). Specifically, Dexter Green and Jay Gatsby perceived a woman that they loved as their main direction of life. As what had been written by Fitzgerald, the character named Daisy is so precious for Gatsby. On the phrase which stated: "her casual whim gave a new direction to his life" (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 224) and "no illusion as to the world in which she had grown up could cure his illusion as to her desirability" (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 228). Both Jay Gatsby and Dexter Green (the main characters on *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams*) experienced drastic progression from poverty to wealth and success, and both their lives were concerned with desired outcomes: "My career is largely a matter of futures" (Fitzgerald, 1989, p. 226), Dexter said. Peculiarly, Dexter's aspirations for the future were dominated by his past and influenced by a character named Judy who moved on and left Dexter to long for a version of her from years earlier. This was also the same problem that Gatsby had faced, and his pursuit was particularly an action to redeem the past that he perceived as an unfortunate past which was full of poverty.

Undeniably, the struggle between aspirations for the future and the unalterable effect of the past is a theme that Fitzgerald claimed as "prevalent in his own life and work" (Theron, 2013, p. 14). *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* focused on social struggle, and since the beginning part of both stories, it pointed Gatsby and Dexter who were not originally born from rich family. That is why they tried eagerly to recover their past and pursued their dream to be successful men who were categorized as wealthy, being accepted and also respected by the society of America at that time (1920s). The case or issue of Gatsby and Dexter might refer to the one of literary criticism, and the one which is quite applicable for their issue is Marxist literary criticism or in brief, called Marxism. For Marxism, getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, and the media. (Lois, 2006). Thus, economic issue is the *foundation* on which the *superstructure* of social, political, ideological realities are built. Economic power therefore, always includes social and political power as well, which is why many Marxists today refer to *socioeconomic class*, rather than economic class, when talking about the class structure. In Marxist theory, economic conditions are referred to as "*material* circumstances, and the social/political/ideological atmosphere generated by material conditions is called the *historical* situation" (Lois, 2006, p. 54). *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* mainly talk about social struggle and economic power in society.

Fitzgerald's literary works have been researched previously researched by some researchers. They also mostly focuses on the economy or class struggle

issue. For instance, Adam Meehan (2014) reported that *the Great Gatsby* is kind of novel which symbolizes the structure of “ambiguous socially-projected racial makeup and racial boundaries” (p. 77). Engrose and Clausen on their theses also clarified that *the Great Gatsby* specialized in the topic of social conscience, materialistic status quo and social critique. Meanwhile, the gap of this study and previous studies is the comparison of Fitzgerald’s both literary works which are *the Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams*. The researcher of this study chose these two literary works as the objects of analysis for this study because of those issues. The researcher has also tried to relate these literary works to Marxist criticism since these they consult with social struggle and economic power that refer to the American society in 1920s. In brief, the purpose of this study is to analyze the comparison of both Fitzgerald’s works entitled *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* by using a literary criticism called Marxism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Marxist Criticism

Karl Marx is the father of critical criminology. The core of Marxism is the concept of class struggle: “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another” (Marx and Friedrich, 1888, p. 79). The oppressors in Marx’s period were the owners of the means of production (the bourgeoisie), and the oppressed were the workers (the proletariat). The bourgeoisie strives to keep the cost of labor at a minimum, and the proletariat strives to sell its labor at the highest possible price. These opposing goals are the major source of conflict in a capitalist society.

The bourgeoisie enjoys the upper hand because capitalist societies have large armies of unemployed workers eager to secure work at any price, thus driving down the cost of labor. According to Marx, these “economic and social arrangements, the material conditions of people’s lives, determine what they will know, believe, and value, and how they will behave” (Walsh, 2012, p. 94). Thus, in Marxist theory, economic condition could impact human’s believes and actions. This fact supports the condition in Fitzgerald’s works; *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* where Jay Gatsby and Dexter Green behaved and acted based on their desire to have economic power and their passion to get economic power reflect to their hard works in earning money, adjust with the elite society, and act like they are powerful economically so that they will be accepted, respected, and adored by the elite society.

### Marxism and Class Struggle

Class struggle is derived by “carrying the fight on until it results in a socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, conditions for the extinction of classes and the creation of classless society are being prepared” (Mbengo, 1978, p. 9). In Marxist theory, the proletariats (lower class/low social status) should struggle about their equality with the bourgeoisie (higher class/high

social status). The proletariats have specific motive to remove the term of classes. Since the term “classes” refer to the actions to differentiate the social status that exactly create a gap between those who are from high social status and those who are from low social status. Heilbroner (1980) stated that “Marxist depiction of class struggle is not merely that of a never-ending contest that will continue as long as mankind exists. Rather, it is a struggle that eventually achieves the conditions necessary for its own resolution” (p. 73). Therefore, those who experience class struggle, try to find the resolution of their struggle.

Above all, Classes and Class Struggle are basically the product of economic development. The economic superiors are conditioning their political superiority. The class which owns the means of production and which has economic power, take over the political power as well. They hold, in the first place, state power and all the means of political power which go with several important points in the society such as polices, prisons, armies, and courts (Heilbroner, 1980). Thus, it can be said that the domination of production produces also all “other types of domination of society” (Mbengo, 1978, p. 10). That is why many people want to get economic power because when they have that, they will have power in society and would be able to dominate the society. This fact refers to Gatsby and Dexter who wanted to have economic power so that they can have social power in the society and being able to get the noble women that they love. Gatsby who knew exactly that Daisy has been legally married to Tom Buchanan, tried to get Daisy back by being rich. He thought that he can be a domination in the society when he had much money and could defeat Daisy’s husband, Tom Buchanan who was originally born from a wealthy and famous family. Dexter also tried to act like the noble man by adjust himself with the noble men regarding to the clothes, the way they talked and acted, and did not tell the truth to Judy when she asked whether he was actually rich or not. He preferred to say to Judy that he was rich since at the beginning Judy said that she became sad when she found that the man that she used to love was actually poor but the man did not tell the truth. Dexter tried to pretend to be rich and became a domination in society. In addition, he also acted like a noble and worked hard to earn much money.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is part of descriptive qualitative study by conducting library research and analyzing documents. Creswell (2007) mentioned that “analyzing and examining documents” is part of the first steps in conducting qualitative study (p. 38). Therefore, this study can be categorized as qualitative study. This study uses Karl Marx’s theory of Marxism that had been written on his book entitled *The Communist Manifesto* and also Karl Marx’s theory of Marxism that has been rewritten and reorganized by Lois Tyson on his book entitled *Critical Theory*. The theory of Marxism focuses and analyzes the economic power and social issues in literary work. The objects of analysis for this study are both F. Scott Fitzgerald’s

literary works entitled *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* which particularly depicted the American Dreams in 1920s. This study compares both of the literary works by using Marxism in order to find out whether there are similarities or differences between them and how these two literary works depicted Americans' class struggle at the period of 1920s based on Marxism's perspective.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **American Society in 1920s as Being Depicted in *the Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams***

Knowing the ideology that blinds the middle class to the socioeconomic inequities in contemporary America is necessary in order to connect deeper to Marxism. In large part, the middle class is blinded by their belief in the *American dream*, which tells them that financial success is simply the product of initiative and hard work. Therefore, if some people are poor, it is because they are shiftless and lazy (Lois, 2006). That is why American society believes that as long as they can work hard, they will get what they want, including being rich and having high social status. Lois then added that in America, people believe that "it is natural to want to "get ahead," to want to own a better house and wear better clothes. The key word here is *better*, which refers not only to "better than I had before" but also to "better than other people have." That is, embedded within the belief in "getting ahead" is the belief in *competition* as a natural or necessary mode of being" (p. 57). Gatsby also wanted to compete with Tom Buchanan in order to determine which one is the richest between both of them and which one is certainly appropriate to get Daisy by comparing the money and ability to fulfil everything that Daisy wanted and desired. In *Winter Dreams*, Dexter did not have any competition with a particular man to get Judy's heart. However, Dexter had competition with Judy's expectation of marrying a rich man and Dexter worked hard to fulfil his beloved lady's expectation.

### **A Comparison of Gatsby's and Dexter's Desire for Being Rich**

There are various similarities and differences between *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* that had been written by Fitzgerald. The main point and most significant similarity between the two literary works is the importance of class rank in their era. Both stories emphasized class rank, which became very crucial in those literary works. Class rank gives information about how much money you make and how well you can show it off to others. In *The Great Gatsby*, it is told that Tom, Daisy, and Gatsby were all wealthy and lived in prosperity. Each of them showed off their wealth with the types of car they drove, the size, model, and texture of their houses as well with the furniture, and also the types of clothes and accessories that they wore. In addition, since they are so high up on the social standings due to their possessions and money, people surround them looked up to the three of them while they also wished they could live a life that Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy lived.

In *Winter Dreams*, class rank was emphasized for the first time when Judy told Dexter that she was extremely disappointed when the man she loved lied to her about the fact that he was only a poor man and pathetically acted as a rich man. Next, in one part of the story, Judy asked Dexter whether he was rich or not and became jubilant when she heard that Dexter made lots of money. One main difference between the *Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* is that Gatsby still laid in his hopes and believed that he might be able to be with Daisy once again when he had become rich. Meanwhile, *Winter Dreams* tells a story that Dexter without any doubt knew that he could never be able to be with Judy. At the moment when Gatsby finally became rich and at the time he saw Daisy for the last time, he undoubtedly believed that he would be able to get her heart. In reverse, Dexter consciously realized that he could never be able to achieve Judy's standard or even living a standard that Judy expected. Particularly, Dexter knew that even though he succeeded in making much money, Judy never found any interest in marrying him but she only jokingly flirted on him to have some fun. At the end, the main theme was the importance of social ranking, which was determined by your wealth and that so called social ranking is perceived as a media to get what you want, whether it is in reality, such as the sincere love that Gatsby expected to get from Daisy, or illusive feeling of love that Dexter looked for from Judy.

In any relationship within the two literary works, there were social issues of how much money someone could have. For instance, rich girls did not want to marry poor boys, even though they loved them. That is why both stories, *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams*, stressed the importance of wealth in order to be loved by your loved ones (Kennstar, 2014). The reason of why Gatsby and Dexter desired to be rich is actually to get the women that they loved. Both of Gatsby and Dexter were originally did not come from rich family or what had been popularly called in 1920s by the Americans as "the old money". Gatsby came from poor family and even since his childhood, he kept struggling with his social class issue (Bunce, 2015). Meanwhile, Dexter came from the middle class. In comparison, there is a difference between Gatsby's and Dexter's romance. Gatsby still believed that he could get Daisy when he became rich. In contrast, Dexter realized that he would not be able to be paired with Judy due to his current social status. Similarly, both of them loved the noble women who were apparently born from rich family. In purpose to get these women's love, they both tried and pretended so hard to become rich men who had high social status.

#### **A Comparison on the Relation between Gatsby's and Dexter's Desire for Being Rich, Economic Power and Class Struggle through Marxism.**

Like has been explained in the literature review, Marxist criticism focuses on the social struggle and economic power. If you are financially powerful, it means that you are powerful as well in the politic area and in society. Gatsby and Dexter who were originally from the proletariats (low social status), eager to get the love of women who were from bourgeoisie (high social status). In order to

have their beloved women, they need to be powerful economically. They were doing their class struggle. They tried to leave their past (when they were poor) and pursue their dreams for being rich. Although Gatsby had to do the illegal business in purpose to earn money, and Dexter had to lie to Judy that he is rich and tried to act as noble man by learning how the noble man act from the elite society, Gatsby and Dexter continuously persisted their dream to become rich and get the women that they love by their money. The acts that Gatsby and Dexter did in pursuing their dreams refer to the Marxist theory of economic power and class struggle.

### **American Society in *the Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams***

Both of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* were set during the post–World War I economic boom of the 1920s. It could be seen as a chronicle of the American dream at a point in this nation's history when capitalism's promise of economic opportunity for all seemed at its peak of fulfilment. "Get-rich-quick" schemes abounded, and many of them succeeded, for it was a time when stocks could be bought on a 10 percent margin, which means that a dollar's worth of stocks could be purchased, on credit, for ten cents. So even the "little man" could play the stock market and hope to make his fortune there (Lois, 2006). This ideology of getting rich quickly and the richness can be pursued by everyone is an ideology that had been adopted by Gatsby and Dexter. They believed that as long as they can work hard and kept trying, they might be able to be rich and have economic power.

### **CONCLUSION**

Both of Fitzgerald's literary works *The Great Gatsby* and *Winter Dreams* refer to the Marxist theory which focuses on the class struggle and economic power. Gatsby and Dexter were described by Fitzgerald as characters who earn money in purpose to be accepted and respected by the society and also being able to be loved and accepted by the women who were from high social status that they loved. Both of them thought that when they get money and have economic power, they are also able to have power in society and politic area and get anything that they want. Their beliefs in the economic power pressed them to struggle to go out from their past (low social status) and become people who are appropriate to be with those who are from high social status. American society at their time also provided and even strengthened an ideology which believed that everyone could be rich as long as they work hard. This ideology opens a gate for Gatsby and Dexter for having desires to be rich and possessed a mindset that they were also able to be rich and had high social status.

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